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EVENTS OF THE WEEK

UNCERTAINTY regarding the political regroupings in Germany and France seems likely to continue for some time yet. The French Socialists do not meet to decide their course of action till June 1st, and in the meantime no one can tell whether they will choose to be represented in the new Government or to support it from outside. Neither is there complete certainty yet as to who will be the head of the new administration. All the indications point to M. Herriot, and those sections which still hope that M. Millerand will stand by his threat of a few weeks ago and resign the Presidency of the Republic are talking of M. Painlevé as his successor at the Elysée. Presidents of the French Republic, however, are not in the habit of resigning office, and it is much more likely that M. Painlevé will become Minister of War in a Herriot administration. A more interesting personal question is whether the expected general amnesty will get through the new Chamber and the Senate in time to enable M. Caillaux to stand (with the certainty of being elected) for the Senatorial vacancy created in the Sarthe by the death of Baron d'Estournelles de Constant. If so, he is safe for the portfolio of Finance. The broad issue still in doubt in France is whether the new Ministry will be Left Centre, *i.e.*, including a number of républicains de gauche, or definitely Left, as it will be if the Socialists agree to enter the Cabinet. In either case a policy substantially different from that of the Poincaré Government may be looked for.

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From one point of view the most significant evidence of change is the frank discussion by M. Painlevé of the possibility of French military evacuation of the Ruhr. That, of course, should follow automatically from the adoption of the Experts' Reports, though the experts themselves did not consider their instructions warranted them in doing more than insist on complete economic evacuation. Under M. Poincaré, however, further camouflage would have been inevitable, for the outgoing Premier could not have openly and unashamedly eaten his numerous declarations that the Ruhr would not be evacuated completely till the last penny had been paid by Germany. As it is, difficulties connected with this aspect of the problem remain, for even M. Painlevé demands as the price of evacuation specific guarantees by the Allies as a whole, and both Belgium and Italy seem rather to favour the idea that a complete plan of "sanctions" should be worked out in advance against a possible German default. No such proposal can be entertained by this country. What is needed now is to clean the slate entirely and make a fresh start in all the financial arrangements with Germany. The experts have done their work well, and their scheme makes deliberate evasion by Germany next to impossible. To introduce the new scheme with the accompaniment of contingent menace would be to handicap the German moderates fatally in their fight with their own extremists.

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That fight has not yet developed, though the Reichstag is to meet next week. The German Government is apparently acting on the assumption that it will retain office with the support of all the moderate parties. A committee has been set up under the Chairmanship of Herr Stresemann, containing representatives of the People's Party, the Centre, and the Democrats to consider the course to be taken with regard to the Dawes Report. It seems probable that this committee will recommend the acceptance of the Report, subject to the military evacuation of the Ruhr, the release of prisoners, the repatriation of deportees, and security for private persons in the occupied area. On these conditions, eminently reasonable in themselves, a majority in the Reichstag may be expected for the Report, whether the Nationalists join the Government or remain outside; and, if the Allies display a conciliatory spirit, the two-thirds majority required for constitutional amendments should be forthcoming.

No American President, on the eve of the electoral campaign, has ever been more anomalously placed than Mr. Coolidge is at this moment. In the primaries his rivals faded away. There is nothing in sight to prevent his nomination by the Republicans at Cleveland next month. And yet he can do nothing with either House of Congress. He is opposed to the Senate inquiries into the oil scandals and the conduct of Mr. Daugherty, the ex-Attorney-General; but the inquiries go on. Both Houses have offered him the most direct affront on the soldiers' bonus by passing the Bill over his veto. He has been beaten on the Administration's tax-reduction plan and on the exclusion of the Japanese, and he is having a further spell of trouble over the World Court. It is doubtless lucky for Mr. Coolidge that an interval of nearly three months must follow the June nominations, but there is no security that this interval will be free from peril, especially as the Senate will insist upon extending its investigations beyond the Department of Justice into the Treasury, and it is no secret that Washington fears the unveiling of a further miserable story of graft and chicanery. To-day, Mr. Coolidge, for all his negative record, is the Republicans' one asset. If, in these circumstances, he should prove able to hold the Presidency, he will have established a unique record.

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Gandhi and C. R. Das have been conferring in Bombay, and neither has changed his position on the essential questions of the Councils and co-operation. The Press comments have been in many cases misleading, but the exact position is not difficult to state. Mr. Ghandi is still, as he must be, against political action, and therefore against all participation in the legislative Assemblies. The Das method of using the Assemblies for obstruction is for him neither non-co-operation nor non-violence. But he accepts as a fact the Swaraj party and its programme. He will not organize against it or denounce it. To do so, indeed, would be mere folly, since Mr. Gandhi knows that the educated classes are in favour of political action. Nor is there anything new in his declaration on the boycott. Mr. Gandhi is for the boycott of foreign cloth. He could not preach his doctrine of homespun, as he preaches it, if he were not. But he is against the boycott of Empire goods, which he regards as an expression of nationalist animosity. All this is quite consistent with his leadership since 1920, but plainly it does not lessen the difficulties of his present position. His manifesto, it is expected, will mark a definite break between the once all-powerful leader and the party led by Das and Nehru.

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Mr. Shaw's Unemployment Insurance Bill was read a second time without a division, but the course of the debate indicated that considerable opposition to some of its provisions is likely to develop later on. We fully share the views of those members who object to the extension of the scheme to children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. This proposal was criticized by Mr. H. A. L. Fisher and by a Labour member, Mr. Cove, on the ground that it would discourage Local Education Authorities from raising the school age and induce parents to withdraw their children from school prematurely. Even the Minister of Labour admitted that if the age of fourteen were definitely placed in an Insurance Act as the age of leaving school the psychological effect would be to stereotype a bad practice, and he promised to consider in Committee any proposal which, while bringing young workers under the scheme, mentioned no age. He also promised to accept an amendment that made it clear that a child should not come into benefit until thirty contributions had accrued, which would mean that he had worked for wages for about eight months. The amendments would be improvements, but we think it would be better to delete the whole clause. Apart from its effect on education, it is ridiculous to give these children the full status of industrial workers. Other dubious features of the Bill are the extension of unemployment benefit to workers unemployed as the result of strikes; and the incorporation of continuous benefit, on lines similar to those on which "uncovenanted" benefit is now given, as a permanent feature of the scheme.

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During the debate on Monday on the position of pre-war pensioners, Sir John Davidson hotly assailed Ministers for breaking their pledges. He was making, he said, a hobby of collecting broken pledges, and proposed to publish his collection, illustrated with photographs. We are not sure that this particular episode would deserve a prominent place in such a collection, but the cases of the ex-ranker officers and of the discharged police strikers would be damaging exhibits. We know that candidates nowadays are plagued with innumerable questions on points of detail, but they ought, nevertheless, to be most careful not to make promises on matters vitally affecting small groups of individuals which they may subsequently find it undesirable or impossible to fulfil. This rule applies with special force to potential Ministers and party leaders, and in the case of the police strikers we cannot see that there was any excuse for Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues. They both could and should have foreseen the difficulties in the way of the reinstatement of these men. We do not wish to lay undue stress on these episodes, which will probably not recur now that the Labour leaders have had actual experience of office; but they deserve to be noted, especially in view of the irritating tone of moral superiority to the older and benighted parties which the Labour Party and its leaders consistently affect.

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In defence of his policy in the matter of the police-strikers Mr. Henderson naively explained that it was one thing to be in favour of a certain course of action and another to be able to give effect to your desire. We wonder how many of the darling projects of the Labour Party would survive the moment of final decision whether or not practical effect could and should be given to them. The idea that a Labour Government would be able to provide "work instead of doles," has already faded away in the light of Mr. Shaw's discovery that he cannot produce rabbits out of a hat, and we now find him gloomily looking forward to a long period of time during which the average number of the unemployed is not to fall below 800,000, which is only about 20 per cent. less than the present figure. There can be no doubt, however, that the Government would provide work instead of doles if it knew how to do so. But would it nationalize the mines if it could? It is safe to predict that it would do nothing of the kind, even if it had an independent majority. Nationalization is precisely the kind of policy which loses, once the attempt is made to translate it into a Parliamentary Bill, all the plausibility it possesses as a generalization.

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For proof of this fact we need scarcely look further than the Bill defeated last week after its terms had been brilliantly and pitilessly dissected by Mr. Lloyd George. It provided that after the colliery-owners had been bought out by the community, and the royalty-owners expropriated, the mines were to be handed over to the control of a Council on which the Miners' Federation were to have half the representation. This body was

to fix wages and prices and generally to supervise the running of the industry. Even then the miners were not to be bound by the decisions of the Council. There was to be arbitration in the case of disagreement between the Federation and the Council, and the right to strike in the last resort was safeguarded. The State was to be responsible, as Mr. Lloyd George pointed out, for any losses sustained under this precious scheme, while if there were any profits they were to go back into the industry. We can understand that the miners might support such a plan, if they had sufficient confidence in the business capacity of their leaders and felt sufficiently certain that the patience of the public would prove inexhaustible; but we find it difficult to believe that anyone who is not a miner would really allow it to be carried out. The truth is that the old State Socialism is dead, and that, in spite of the efforts of the Guild Socialists to fill the gap, no alternative brand has yet been worked out that is feasible even on paper. As things are now, any scheme which the miners would regard as worth their support is certain to appear intolerable to anyone else.

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Last week-end brought the welcome news that the wage disputes in the coalmining and in the building industry were well on the way to final settlement. In both cases the men's representatives agreed to recommend their members to accept a provisional agreement, which was a distinct advance on any previous offer by the employers concerned. In the case of the building industry a ballot is to be taken to authorize the completion of negotiations on an agreed general basis: refusal would mean an immediate strike, but an overwhelming majority in favour is expected, for the unions are advising their members that further concessions can be obtained through the provision for an inquiry into continuity of employment, and other vital issues. It need hardly be said that any such concessions will, like the wage advance, swell the cost of building houses; and it would be interesting to know how far the terms of the agreement have been affected by expectations aroused by the Government's housing policy. The miners and the coalowners are still discussing points of detail which require settlement before the ballot on acceptance is taken. The only point which is likely to lead to any difficulty is a new claim by the Miners' Federation that the agreement shall apply only to trade unionists; which on the face of it is a complete reversal of the cardinal trade-union principle that no one must be paid less than the union rate. Its object is, of course, to exclude non-unionists altogether, and in most districts the owners have always resolutely refused any such condition of employment, not because they have anything to lose by it, but on the ground that the rights of the individual cannot be interfered with arbitrarily in this manner.

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The proceedings of the Court of Arbitration, which is now considering the claim of the shipyard workers for a national advance of 10s. a week, and the special claim by Southampton for a special additional advance in that centre, reveal the appalling plight of this great national industry. Whereas before the war no less than 20 per cent. of our new tonnage was built for foreign nations, the export proportion in 1923 was less than 3 per cent. of the diminished output. Britain's share of the world-production of tonnage has fallen from 58 to 39 per cent. The employers' representatives, after quoting these figures, went on to argue that while things were improving, this was due almost entirely to the acceptance of contracts at or even under bare cost of wages and materials, and that therefore any addition to wages was out of the question. It remains to be seen whether the unions can rebut this evidence. Weekly wages in this industry show an increase for skilled men of only some 20 per cent. above pre-war—the lowest in any great national industry, and therefore real wages are far below pre-war. On the other hand, hourly rates are considerably higher than this owing to a reduction in the length of the working day, and the result of this inquiry seems likely to emphasize once more the vital difference between wages and labour cost.

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Lord Thomson's statement on the Government's airship policy made it clear that their rejection of the Burney scheme was based mainly on the belief that it committed them to heavier liabilities than they were justified in undertaking at the present stage, and that it would eventually confer a virtual monopoly on the Airship Guarantee Company. Under the present scheme, three years will be devoted to research, experiment, the development of plant and ground facilities, and the construction of two airships of the largest size, one by the State, the other by the company, who will have the option of repurchase, after trial, at a reduced price. An Advisory Board, representing the Treasury, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Colonial Office, and Post Office, will be created to advise on the general lines of development, and a second Board, of a purely technical character, will advise on design and construction. In the later stages of development, tenders will be invited on similar terms from all constructors, who will have the benefit of all data acquired by the Air Ministry. Lord Thomson's statement was freely criticized in the House of Lords by supporters of the Burney scheme; but if there is really a commercial future for lighter-than-air craft, it is very desirable to broaden as much as possible the basis of development, and there are obvious advantages, from the point of view of defence, and of safety in flying, in the association of the Air Ministry with private enterprise during the experimental period.

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Our Irish Correspondent writes: "Recent debates in the Dáil suggest that the position of the Government is becoming more precarious day by day, and the present militant attitude of the ex-Service men is adding to their embarrassment. Mr. Cosgrave's tactics in face of attack from various quarters are successful temporarily in preventing any capital issue from coming to a head, but they are not calculated to win the sympathy of members or of the public at large, which is beginning to feel that its representatives do not face facts. The Boundary question will probably provide the 'acid test'; everyone is anxious to see what will happen; and now that the issue has been publicly raised no amount of political skill will suffice to put it on the shelf again. During the last debate the President spent most of his time deploring the fall in value of the National Loan (standing now at 93), and ascribed this to the pessimistic speeches of deputies. It seems a pity that he did not take his own advice, and congratulate the House that the loan had not fallen even lower, considering the difficulties through which the country had passed. The real fact is that the price of this particular issue, which is bought and sold in a very limited market, depends more than anything else on the extent to which the Government buys or sells for its own account. Meanwhile, we are promised the early passing of a Trade Facilities Act and the adoption of a development policy in connection therewith. If this promise is carried out speedily it may go a long way towards saving the prestige of the Government."

HOUSING SNARES.

MANY important details of the Government's housing policy are still obscure, but the time has come to examine carefully the features that have been disclosed. It is clear that some kind of guaranteed programme, extending over fifteen years, designed to secure the building operatives against unemployment, is to figure prominently in the scheme. Obviously, the present Government is not in a position to give a guarantee that is worth anything, unless it is endorsed by all parties in the House of Commons. A great responsibility will thus fall on the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and they cannot consider too soon or too carefully their attitude towards the suggested undertaking.

It is already obvious that the guarantee to the building trade cannot be very definite. Mr. Wheatley has agreed that the local authorities must be free to decide how many houses they will build, and to suspend operations at any time they choose. On the face of it, this would seem to destroy the notion of the guarantee altogether. But there is little doubt that, under the financial terms proposed, it will always be to the interests of the local authorities to build as many houses as they can. They appear to be contributing to the subsidy, but in reality they are doing nothing of the kind. The excess of revenue which each new house will bring them in the shape of local rates over the additional expenditure on local services which its erection will entail will amount in urban districts to more than the £4 10s. per annum which they are expected to contribute. The building trade may calculate accordingly that they need not worry much about the local authorities' veto, provided that they can get the State firmly committed to its subsidy. The proposed guarantee is thus likely to reduce itself to the following: that Parliament undertakes to provide £9 per annum for forty years on all houses that the local authorities are agreeable to build within the next fifteen years up to the limit of some two and a half million houses. We are confronted at the outset with an anomaly. It is felt reasonable that the local authorities, which do not stand to suffer financially, should retain complete freedom; but the State, which is to foot the bill, is asked to tie its hands.

It may be assumed that the Government will seek to qualify the undertaking by attaching conditions with regard to building costs. But in the nature of the case no such conditions can prove an adequate safeguard against abuse. On the other hand, the more such conditions are multiplied the greater does the danger become that the guarantee will prove worthless to those to whom it is given; that a subsequent Government may suspend the housing programme consistently with the letter of the undertaking, but so as to leave the conviction rankling in the minds of the building operatives that they have been deceived and betrayed. It is one thing for Parliament to envisage a fifteen years' programme, as something which it hopes to execute but is free to modify in any way should circumstances change; it is quite another thing to treat such a programme as part of a bargain with a particular industrial interest. The nearest approach to such a bargain that has hitherto been made was the Corn Production Act, and the precedent is not auspicious. That was a case of a guarantee, running for a few years only, swept away, as soon as it began to operate, by the very Government that gave it. Parliament would do well to reflect very seriously on that experience before it incurs the far graver responsibility of binding its successors for fifteen years.

What is the justification suggested for the guarantee? It is not as though the building trades offered to throw their doors wide open, and to permit the rapid expansion in the labour-supply for which the housing shortage imperatively calls. They offer merely to relax somewhat their apprenticeship regulations. How far this will enlarge the labour-supply it is difficult to estimate; for one of the troubles at present is that the number of apprentices is far below the permitted union percentage, not because employers are unwilling to take them, but because it is difficult to find youths willing to work under apprenticeship conditions and pay. Undoubtedly the relaxations of apprenticeship will help. Undoubtedly, on the other hand, their effect in increasing the labour-supply will be very slow. It is, indeed, only in the latter part of the fifteen-year period that the Building Committee expects them to become fully effective. Here an essential absurdity becomes apparent in the idea of the fifteen-years' guarantee. If it is to serve any useful purpose to the building trade, it can only be by compelling Parliament to sanction more State-aided houses than, apart from the guarantee, it would choose to sanction. If this is the position towards the end of the fifteen years, it is certain that Parliament will not subsidize further houses when the fifteen years are over and the undertaking has expired. Thus the guarantee, if it ever really operated, could only serve to produce ultimately a colossal unemployment in the building trade.

Nor is that all. In the meantime, a guarantee, however qualified, would tend inevitably to force building prices up. If Mr. Wheatley imagines that building costs are essentially a matter of the goodwill of employers or merchants, or of the effectiveness of Government control, he will speedily be disillusioned. We back the forces of supply and demand against the pious intentions of the manufacturers of building materials, or the ingenuity of all the officials in Whitehall. Push demand forward far in excess of supply, and prices will rise all along the line and all the time. This consideration takes us, indeed, to the heart of the housing difficulty. We want to build all the houses we can, and not to leave any available capacity unutilized. On the other hand, we want to build them cheaply. This means that the expansion of our housing programme must keep pace with the expansion of the capacity of the building trade—neither proceeding far in advance of it, nor falling far behind it. This is, in any case, a very delicate operation for the Government to undertake. A perfect adjustment of demand and supply is hardly to be looked for. But it cannot hope to achieve even an approximate adjustment, unless its hands are as free as those of the local authorities to curtail building operations, whenever this seems to be desirable.

In our judgment, therefore, all that the Government or Parliament can legitimately promise is to endeavour to build houses on a scale which will not leave any considerable building capacity unutilized for long. If the building trade will not agree even to relax its apprenticeship regulations on these terms, the time will have come for the State to address the building trade in a very different tone. Whatever excuses may be found in past unemployment for the attitude of the building unions, the fact remains that they are pursuing a more anti-social policy than the British people have tolerated from any vested interest in the past. Unemployment and housing are the two dominating social problems of the day. The building of houses on a large scale is the most obvious project by which we

might hope to absorb directly a large number of unemployed workers, and to give to the rest of our industries the general stimulus of which they stand in need. We discuss, appropriately enough, schemes for super-power stations and road-developments, but we allow the veto of the building unions to close the door on any adequate development of housing, which is no less essential. This is not a condition of things which the community can tolerate much longer.

Another aspect of the Government's policy will require equally close examination. We can see no adequate justification for the proposal to increase the State subsidy from £6 to £9 per annum. It will clearly not secure the building of a single additional house; for there is no difficulty in letting at remunerative rents on the basis of the present subsidy all the houses that can be built. Its object is to enable the new houses to be let at rather lower rents, and thus make them available to a poorer class of tenant. It is doubtful whether this object will be achieved, for the increased subsidy will be another factor facilitating an increase in building costs; indeed, the mere announcement of it has already had that effect. But the objective seems to us a very dubious one, even if it were achieved. One vital question must be faced in connection with any new housing policy. How do we hope to get our houses built in future? Do we hope to get back in time to an economic basis, or do we accept the view that housing must remain for all time a State-provided service? There are some, like Major Barnes, who cheerfully accept the latter view on the analogy of education, and do not shrink even from the corollary, which the analogy suggests, that the houses will ultimately be supplied free of rent. We believe the analogy to be a false one, though it suggests one pertinent consideration—the danger of dividing the population into two sharply contrasted castes, those who live in State houses, and those who live in houses of a superior type.

But ultimately there is no practicable middle course between going the whole hog with Major Barnes and putting housing back on an economic basis. This, we repeat, is far easier to do than may appear, if we would only reform our rating system on sensible lines; and we are glad to see that Mr. Pringle has emphasized this aspect of the problem, and that Sir John Simon has introduced a Bill to "untax" new improvements. We do not suggest that we can revert to private enterprise at an early date; it may well be that there will be a permanent place for State housing schemes, even if we do get back to an economic basis. But the economic basis should be our goal, and we should certainly be careful not to move further away from it, as we shall inevitably do if the State subsidy is increased. Parliament must not slide into the policy of Major Barnes without intending it; and the Government should be firmly pressed to declare its attitude on this important issue.

DOES UNEMPLOYMENT NEED A DRASTIC REMEDY?

By J. M. KEYNES.

THE discussion on this subject in the columns of THE NATION has not lacked a few optimists. Nevertheless most of those who have taken part share in some degree the misgivings which Mr. Lloyd George voiced in opening the debate. If a country, with no new advantages of raw materials or competitive power, with a larger population, produces less and lives better, it seems probable that its poise may be unstable, and that something more drastic is needed than merely hoping for the best. But what? It is in the lameness of the answers to this question—we must all admit—that THE NATION discussion has proved weak.

What is the magnitude of the problem? The number of unemployed adult males is now about 770,000, after having been 1,200,000 at the beginning of 1923, and 1,450,000 at the beginning of 1922. If the figures be analyzed we find a great concentration of unemployment in the shipbuilding and engineering industries (*i.e.*, nearly four times the percentage elsewhere). Outside these industries, unemployment amongst adult males does not now much exceed 4 per cent. of the employable population. The following is a rash guess at the composition of the total:—

1. Normal unemployed (*i.e.*, brief intervals of unemployment between jobs, &c.) ...	200,000
2. Unemployables from age, disablement, temperament, &c.	100,000
3. Excess of labour supply in Engineering and associated industries	150,000
4. Excess of labour supply in other industries	320,000
	770,000

It seems very optimistic to assume, with Mr. Layton, that the figures in the third and fourth groups will cure themselves if we merely sit by smiling and avoid gross errors of policy. No one has a firmer belief than I in the relation between unemployment and monetary policy, and when, two years ago, the figures were nearly double what they are now, this disastrous situation was, I am sure, largely attributable to the slump provoked by a misguided inflation and prolonged by a misguided deflation. But the evil effects of these policies have been working themselves out. Perhaps this cause is not yet eliminated entirely,—but a monetary policy which aimed at reducing the unemployed by more than (say) a further 100,000, would run dangerously near another inflation. On the other hand, the settlement of Europe, if it takes place, and the resuscitation of German export trade will not be an unmixed blessing to our own export industries. To what favourable influences, then, do the optimists look? I do not know.

I agree, therefore, with Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Baldwin, and Mr. Sidney Webb, that there is no place or time here for *laisser-faire*. Furthermore, we must look for succour to the principle that *prosperity is cumulative*. We have stuck in a rut. We need an impulse, a jolt, an acceleration.

Unluckily this good principle has often got into bad hands. It is the grain of truth behind the false promises and hopes of Protectionists and Inflationists alike. They see the initial impact of their policies on the lumbering car of State, and assess justly the social value of an impulse, yet slip backwards through overlooking remoter adjustments and indirect results.

But this is not a good reason for doing nothing. There may be stimulating medicines which are wholesome. There are many examples of cumulative prosperity, both in recent and in earlier experience. British prosperity in the nineteenth century owed very much to the railway boom in its first half, beginning at home and extending abroad, and to the immense building activity of its latter half. In the past five years the rebuilding of the devastated areas has, independently of its inflationary features, given a stimulus to French enterprise which has much enriched the nation. The boom in motors and in building, combined, no doubt, with many favourable attendant circumstances, has carried the United States to an unprecedented standard

of high living. Is there no tonic draught for us to give us courage and confidence to be active?

Business is weighed down by timidity. It lacks conviction that anything good will continue for long. It watches anxiously for the signs of retrogression; and, as soon as the army wavers, individuals bolt. No one is ready to plant seeds which only a long summer can bring to fruit.

Yet some of the causes of our unemployment are of such a kind that this halting, wavering mood is fatal. Part of it is due to the immobility of labour as between industries; part to the fault of Trade Unions; and part to a disparity of wages between what are called the sheltered and the unsheltered industries. But we cannot cure these ills by forcing labour into new directions by the pressure of starvation, or by breaking the power for evil, and perhaps for good also, of the Trade Unions, or by reducing wages in the sheltered industries to the level of the unsheltered. From these thoughts the mind must be averted, for from such directions help will not come. Rather we must seek to submerge the rocks in a rising sea,—not forcing labour out of what is depressed, but attracting it into what is prosperous; not crushing the blind strength of organized labour, but relieving its fears; not abating wages where they are high, but raising them where they are low. And there is no way in the world of achieving these better alternatives but by confidence and courage in those who set enterprise in motion.

Is there not a chance that we can best achieve this by recreating the mood and the conditions in which great works of construction, requiring large capital outlays, can again be set on foot? Current savings are already available on a sufficient scale—savings which, from lack of an outlet at home, are now drifting abroad to destinations from which we as a Society shall gain the least possible advantage. Private enterprise unaided cannot stop this flow. The policy of preventing public utilities from yielding more than a modest private profit has gone so far that it is no longer worth the while of private enterprise to run a risk in a field where the gain is limited and the loss unlimited. We are in danger, therefore, of interfering with private initiative, yet substituting nothing for it. The advances under the Trade Facilities Act, begun for a temporary emergency and on a small scale, point the way, perhaps, to a new method of administering an important part of the savings of the public. The next developments of politico-economic evolution may be found in co-operation between private initiative and the public Exchequer. The true socialism of the future will emerge, I think, from an endless variety of experiments directed towards discovering the respective appropriate spheres of the individual and of the social, and the terms of fruitful alliance between these sister instincts.

In the light of such reflections, we can indicate the next steps. The Chancellor of the Exchequer should devote his sinking fund and his surplus resources, not to redeeming old debt with the result of driving the national savings to find a foreign outlet, but to replacing unproductive debt by productive debt. The Treasury should not shrink from promoting expenditure up to (say) £100,000,000 a year on the construction of capital works at home, enlisting in various ways the aid of private genius, temperament, and skill.

It is for the technicians of building, engineering, and transport to tell us in what directions the most fruitful new improvements are awaiting us. But three fields of construction are already known to everyone in a general way. It should not be beyond the technical accomplishments of our engineers to devise a national scheme for the mass production of houses which would supplement the normal activities of the building industry and make up in five or ten years the deficiency with which the latter has proved unable to deal. The adaptation of road-building to the needs of motor transport must plainly be undertaken some day, whether in detail Sir W. Acworth or Lord Montagu is in the right. The development of economical means for the transmission of electrical power is in its infancy in this country. Unaided private enterprise is not capable of dealing with any of these projects, even when their technical soundness is beyond doubt.

I look, then, for the ultimate cure of unemployment, and for the stimulus which shall initiate a cumulative prosperity, to monetary reform—which will remove fear—and to the diversion of the national savings from relatively barren foreign investment into State-encouraged constructive enterprises at home—which will inspire confidence. That part of our recent unemployment, which is not attributable to an ill-controlled credit cycle, has been largely due to the slump in our constructional industries. By conducting the national wealth into capital developments at home, we may restore the balance of our economy. Let us experiment with boldness on such lines,—even though some of the schemes may turn out to be failures, which is very likely.

ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND.

THE NINE.

WHATEVER the countryside may be in need of, it is not churches. From the dormer windows between which I am writing I can make out, in clear weather, nine spires. Nine churches and nine parsons, in a small and scantily populated district, seem a liberal provision, over and above all the nonconformist and meliorist activity. Nine churches and nine parsons ought to be able, ought to have been able, to accomplish something.

That there should be these nine parsons on our bit of landscape is a fortunate thing for me. In writing this series of articles I have been conscious of putting off writing about our local clergy. I have felt that if I wrote about our own parson and about the parsons in, say, the next two hamlets, my report might not be easily believed. If, however, I tell you instead all that matters or something that matters about the whole nine parsons, you are likely, as a reasonable man or woman, to be brought to some knowledge of the truth about the Church in rural England, or, I am quite content if you prefer me to say, in my part of rural England. When I have done you shall make for yourself an average of the nine, remembering the while, if you please, that our region cannot be reckoned outlandish, that it is within easy reach of a famous cathedral city, and that these nine parsons have been for some years under the direction of one of our most enlightened bishops.

All this to begin with, because the difficulty about picturing the Church as it really is in many parts of rural England is not, I think, after considering the matter a long time, the great difficulty of making a faithful picture, but the greater difficulty of making it believable.

If, after all that has been written of late years about farmers and labourers, and all the acquaintance with them that town-dwellers gain as week-enders and holiday-makers, so little of the life and thinking of the masters and men of the hamlets is commonly within the

grasp of urban folk, it is in no way surprising that knowledge, or, as the Methodists say, a realizing sense, of average countryside clericalism, should be uncommon. It is not only that townspeople come very little into touch with the rural clergy. The public imagination is occupied by a legendary country parson. The simple merit of this personage of our literature sets the least worthy rectory or vicarage in an atmosphere of benevolence, however tenuous. Only the other day one of the most responsible of the morning papers was dithyrambic on the "excellence" of the country church, the "devotion" of its parson, the "record of the great English country clergymen that cannot be matched." No one doubts for a second the honesty of the writer. But he can never have looked into one of those joint church magazines published in most rural deaneries. In these ingenuous productions, among the most trustworthy documents we have for forming a judgment on the moral and spiritual results of the union of Church and State in our day, the mentality, education, and outlook, the preoccupations, habits, and professional life of "a Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman," are pictured in the most convincing way by the rural clergy themselves, each parson of the district in his own quarter or half-page allowance of print. There is nothing in the whole periodical world to be compared with the combined performance in feebleness—unless it be the diocesan magazine, to which, it may be, "the great English country clergymen" contribute.

* * * *

The best of the parsons in the district is my friend, the Rev. A. B., a man with a red face, a loud voice, and a big belly. He knows nothing of theology or history, and his stock of general information is low. He has no books, and, when he is lent one, does not manage to read many pages. He takes in the "Church Times," to which he may give ten minutes, and a London daily which is supplied at half-price to the clergy, on which he may spend half an hour. His sermons are wretched and his congregation small. "He is not cut out for his job," is the indulgent verdict in his parish, "but he's a good sort, the old parson." He is a first-class neighbour, helping eagerly and perspiringly in garden or orchard, with poultry or with bees or goats. There is not a kinder, more generous, or pluckier fellow. When there was an epidemic he was fearless. Two of his parishioners he "laid out," and, unwieldy though he is in body, dug four graves. He seems to know almost all that can be known outside books about the birds, beasts, and trees of the neighbourhood, and was a great walker and a skilful boxer—his name was more than once in the sporting press. All his three sons have done well.

The Rev. C. D., undersized but fit, is the youngest of the local parsons. His living is an old family possession, and simony was committed to keep it warm for him while he was brainlessly failing at examination after examination. He is no reader—someone found that he had never heard of the name of Bernard Shaw—is a drivelling preacher, and has no gifts but health and a high, narrow sense of duty. He is fond of coursing.

The Rev. E. F. is a poultry farmer with pupils. He has had squabbles with his churchwarden and choir of the kind which are called unedifying, came discreditably out of a dispute with the Guardians about a workhouse chaplaincy, and told me that it was years since he had read a book. I have a note of this dictum of his on old furniture in the cottages: "If there is a good chair you will find it by the bedside."

The Rev. G. H., whose predecessor got into trouble in covering up dilapidations at the vicarage on resigning his living, is a man with some reputation as a classical tutor. He seems always to be in hot water in the county paper when there is a nonconformist to bury. On one occasion, when he came to the passage, "We therefore commit his body to the ground . . . in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection," he omitted "sure and certain." His sermons are unintelligible to his congregation because of his affection of the vocal chords. He has a goitre and a medal for sweet peas.

The Rev. I. J. is a scholar. He is often abroad. There is no week-day organization of any sort in his hamlet, and never a lecture or entertainment. He it was who assured a stranger that "nothing whatever is needed in this parish." Some years ago he was in court over a bucket-shop transaction.

The Rev. K. L. is an old hunting-man in a family living. He said to me, "I do appreciate a long day's shoot." His sermon lasts seven minutes, and is cribbed. In the prayer for the Sovereign he still muddles up Victoria, Edward, and George. He does not lift his hat to the schoolmistress or the farmers' wives, but he was distressed by the way in which the Rev. G. H. made difficulties about the funeral service of a servant-girl who had been "a bit free."

The Rev. M. N. has lately been sent to a lunatic asylum.

"Father" O. P., who was a Baptist until he was thirty-two, and has nine children, is so "high" as to be constantly in trouble with the bishop. He is in trouble with his people because he is a gossip.

The Rev. R. S., whose predecessor used to get drunk and had affiliation proceedings instituted against him, is ill-acquainted with soap and water, and has conducted a service with both his bootlaces and cassock-cord trailing. He reads little of anything, is below the average level of intelligence, and his sermons, apart from his stutter, are deplorable. He was an admirer of Bottomley's "John Bull," and is an assiduous distributor of a Catholic Association leaflet on the need of confession.

Not one of these parsons has his church a tenth full. Several frequently preach to less than a dozen, and sometimes to less than half-a-dozen people. When Farmer-corn-merchant-churchwarden Richardson, of whom I have written, attended a ruridecanal meeting and, as he went in, caught a glimpse of the assembled parsons of the district, he was heard to mutter: "What a rummy lot of rooks!" Five of the parsons in my list would be remarked in any company as "odd." How these five and their four brethren who make up the nine are to be accounted for, and how our countryside stands in relation to them all, we shall consider another week.

H. C.

LIFE AND POLITICS

WHAT is the Conservative Party going to do about Mr. Baldwin? The problem of that amiable but childlike leader must be a nightmare to the party organizers. His dove-like innocence is untouched by guile, and the party cannot know from day to day into what trouble his airy spirit will lead them. There has been nothing like him before in politics, and hardly anything like him in fiction outside "Alice in Wonderland." His interview with the "People" has only been equalled by his *communiqué* from Paris. It was an incredible performance, and has received a qualified official denial; but the denial has been denied, and half the Conservative Press believes one side and half the other, not according to whether

it prefers the word of Mr. Baldwin or that of his interviewer, but according to whether it is Die-Hard or anti-Die-Hard. That a responsible statesman should have given the interview at all is sufficiently surprising. That he should have allowed it to appear without apparently seeing a proof almost passes belief. The most likely explanation seems to be that the interviewer did the talking and put the leading questions, and that Mr. Baldwin made his replies without realizing what they would look like in print. But though that may be the explanation, it is not an excuse, and it is unlikely that we have heard the last of the incident. The difficulty for the party is that it has no visible successor. If the Liberal Party, as the "Evening Standard" suggests, has too many Richmonds in the field, the Conservatives have no Richmond at all.

* * *

The new housing proposals have already affected the prices of materials adversely. A well-known public man, who has probably arranged more contracts for the building of working-class houses than anyone in history, tells me that within twenty-four hours of the announcement of the £13 10s. subsidy the cost of building the kind of cottage of which he has erected thousands in many parts of the country, chiefly the mining districts, had risen by £50. The effect of the subsidy, he says, works as unalterably as a natural law. Before the Neville Chamberlain subsidy was proposed he was building at £350 per house. The Chamberlain subsidy of £6 per house, which capitalized meant £70 per house, immediately raised the cost of his houses to £400 and £420. Mr. Wheatley's scheme has already put the cost up to £450 and over, and he anticipates that the appreciation will not stop until it has devoured the whole capital value of the new subsidy. There is no deliberate conspiracy in this. It is the inevitable consequence of great expectations. His view is that the only public assistance in regard to building which does not seriously affect the price of materials is that which takes the form of loans at a cheap rate to public utility enterprises. The explanation, I suppose, is that the latter method operates quietly and without advertisement, while the subsidy is a "loud speaker" that summons all and sundry to share the loot.

* * *

There is much interest as to the scheme which will emerge from the committee which has been sitting for some time, under the chairmanship of Mr. Lloyd George, to deal with the coal problem. I hope the committee will avoid the temptation to make it a feat in the detestable art of electoral window-dressing. There is no direction in which the Liberal Party can stake out a more undisputed claim or do the country a more conspicuous service than in this field. The Labour Party are committed to unequivocal nationalization, which, however superficially attractive, is too hazardous an experiment to make with a vital industry that has to compete in the world-market. At the same time the present chaotic system of ownership and control by thousands of different interests has collapsed beyond any possibility of repair. A momentary peace has been established, but it is only a truce. The fundamental evils remain, and are beyond cure by the pharmacopœia of uncontrolled private ownership. The root of the trouble is the enormous disparity between the various coalfields—a miner in Lancashire hewing 18 cwt. a day while a miner in Yorkshire is hewing 5 tons a day. This keeps the price of coal ruinously high to the public, the wages of labour in the poor fields intolerably low, and the profits of the rich mines so bloated that they cannot be openly distributed. The remedy is not nationalization, but the statutory control of the industry, by which the whole coal riches of the country can be developed in the most economic directions, with due regard to the interests of the consumer, which are at present wholly ignored, and of labour, which is kept in a condition of seething revolt. The view that prevails in some quarters that the abolition of mining royalties will suffice is mere evasion. It is offering the public "ruffles, when wanting a shirt." The Liberal Party has a great duty as well as a great opportunity in this matter, and I repeat that I hope it will not dissipate it in an experiment in electoral window-dressing.

* * *

I have received a circular letter from Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., kindly inviting me to share in "a good thing" that he has in hand. I have not the honour of the acquaintance of Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., and I assume therefore that many others outside his personal circle have received a similar invitation to share in his benefactions. He is—not to put too fine a point on it—engaged in the smuggling business. He is a rum-runner who desires to take me into partnership in the laudable task of providing Americans with wines and spirits contrary to the law of the land. I call it laudable because, according to Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., the unhappy American people are in servitude to a wicked law which has "never been put to the vote." How it has come about, by what mysterious agency a free people has become enslaved to a law it does not want, is not explained. Enough for us to know that it is the deliverance of a people from an iniquitous thraldom to which we are invited. It will, by a happy coincidence, be a profitable work as well as a battle for freedom. I send, say, my £100 to Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., and he delivers the rum at the safe distance of twenty miles from the coast, and guarantees, "barring marine accidents" (for which the underwriters are responsible), to return my money *plus* 25 per cent. within sixty days from the date of shipment. The worthy baronet gives me the assurance that I shall be in the most reputable company in this humane work, which, incidentally, is estimated to transfer £3,000,000 a month from the thirsty Americans to the deserving distillers of Scotland.

* * *

I have not so far availed myself of this invitation to share in the work of emancipation. I do not like the prohibition policy; but it is the law of the United States, and so long as that is the case it is the duty of a foreign Power to respect it. I do not believe it has been passed in defiance of the will of the American people. On the contrary, it has come about by the deliberate action of the American people, and it can be reversed by them as soon as they see fit to reverse it. Nor do I accept the facts and figures which Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., offers me in proof of the suggestion that the American continent is watching the heroic activities of the smugglers with emotions of gratitude. That there is a great deal of evasion of the Prohibition law is undeniable; but I doubt whether relatively it is considerable, and all the disinterested evidence obtainable goes to show that the law is working. In any case, its maintenance or abandonment is the affair of the American people, and it is a slur on the honour of this country that this vast illicit traffic should be organized here to defeat the internal policy of another nation for the shabby motive of enabling Lt.-Col. Sir Brodrick Hartwell, Bart., and his kidney to make enormous profits.

I hear that a case is under the consideration of the Inland Revenue authorities which must establish something like a record in such matters. Whether public action will be taken is, I believe, still an open question, but I understand that the person concerned has undertaken to pay to the Exchequer in monthly instalments a sum of more than a million sterling in respect of understatements of past profits. The recent prosecutions have had a very salutary effect, and it is probable that the large-scale frauds on the Exchequer have been brought within relatively narrow limits; but there are still ways within the law of practising evasion of the super-tax, and much revenue escapes the Exchequer through these channels.

A. G. G.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

SUMMER-TIME.

Thursday, May 22nd.

THE wet warm weather has damped the energies of Parliament. Members flee to the terrace, smoking-rooms, and other cool departments, leaving the actual debating Chamber half-derelict. In these places they discuss Baldwin and Beaverbrook and Birkenhead, heedless of the drip of debate which continues without ceasing in the House itself. On Tuesday, in the discussion of the only important Bill the Government has yet introduced, the attendance rarely numbered a hundred, and through many hours sank well below half that number. A scanty band of drab-robed specialists discussed details of the Unemployed Insurance Bill; with no other audience than the galleries (always full), the reporters, and their fellow-specialists, each of whom eyed the dominant speaker with ill-concealed dislike, and all of whom rose to "catch the Speaker's eye" when the orator sat down. Dr. Macnamara excited some enthusiasm by a clever attack on the contrast between Labour promise and Labour performance, garnished with frequent and deadly quotation. But it was too hot to get angry. The Labour benches received the onslaught with great good temper and laughter. And Mr. Tom Shaw, exuding friendliness and contentment, smiled ever more broadly as the same fusillade was renewed at intervals by other speakers. He was probably pleased that the debate should wander over such understandable challenges, instead of technical questions of actuarial calculations. The Bill is a hotch-pot of disconnected clauses having little connection each with the other. The compulsory insurance of children between fourteen and sixteen was repudiated from all sides of the House, and will evidently be modified in Committee, or go. The production of continuous benefit extending through month after month and year after year was severely criticized, especially from the Tory benches. And the estimate of a permanent residue of 800,000 workless on the "live" register for an indefinite number of years to come excited some comment. Useful contributions were made to the debate by Mr. Graham White and Mr. Trevelyan Thomson, two men typical of those back-bench Liberals who in the various unofficial Committees which are organized in the Liberal Party are pressing forward schemes of Social Reform. Mr. Cove, of Wellingborough, made an effective (maiden) speech for Labour, so also did Mr. Hayday, of Nottingham, the proud father of seventeen. But to those bored with detail the debate must have seemed exceedingly dull.

Far more interest was exhibited in Mr. Baldwin's alleged "indiscretions." The House of Commons does not take these things as seriously as they are sometimes taken outside; and the discussion has been in the main hilarious rather than critical. It was so evident that the published matter contained what Mr. Baldwin would have liked to have said, in confidence to personal friends: or represented what Mr. Baldwin thought: or what Mr. Baldwin ought to have thought: that the question of the various affirmations and repudiations seemed to be of little importance. In the pronouncement on politics, it is quite evident that he is merely repeating the desire of which everyone is conscious: the feeling of whatever is left alive in the Tory Party towards understanding of some social policy which may enable them to regain the allegiance of the great industrial centres. The pertinacious little Mr. Amery causes offence by his persistent defence of Protection, although every sane man knows that that particular dog will not "bark." Like the Cheshire Cat it has vanished tail first and only the "grin" (and that a somewhat sour one) remains. The country refuses to be stirred by the repeal of the McKenna Duties. Some cry wildly on Disraeli, although Disraeli's actual contributions to the "Condition of the People" problem are rather legendary than substantial: others on Lord Randolph Churchill, although he knew nothing about these questions, and cared less. Others seek salvation from his son, who, though barren in constructive ideas, shows willingness to become a "bonnie fighter" against Socialism. Some are playing with the "Broad Scheme" of All-In Insurance, advocated with an air of importance by that aged and respected if somewhat tedious aspirant, Sir John Marriott. It has been hawked about for many years amongst the various political parties: its promises are wild, its demands ridiculous, its actual calculations half-crazy. But it offers something big to the general, which is not concerned with details: and something big, which shall offend no vested interests, is badly needed by the Tory Party at this time. For the rest, Mr. Baldwin's verdicts on his "Shadow Cabinet" and on the adverse newspaper Press outside are so piquant and satisfying that it is pleasant to believe that he delivered them to someone at some time: or that the interviewer —specially arranged by the Central Conservative Office —possessed for his fell work the power of thought-reading or second-sight.

The Liberals are, I think, encouraged by the persistent clinging of the Tory Party to Protection, and wish for nothing so much as another election on that issue. The prospect of a great national campaign to proclaim Liberal ideals is regarded with hope and enthusiasm by the "patient oxen" who have been plodding through lobbies to support an "alien rule." On the other hand, amongst the rank and file at least, and some of the leaders on both sides, there is an increasing desire for understanding. Mr. Lloyd George has greatly increased his popularity in this Parliament by his brilliant and merciless criticism of the Mines Nationalization Bill. The feebleness of the defence revealed the inadequacy of the Labour benches in much of the actual course of debate. It is understood that Committees on National Development, especially in connection with coal and electricity, on the extension of Security through Insurance, and on other important items in the Liberal programme are about to report, and that every step will be taken to put forward this programme as an alternative to Socialism and to Reaction in the country.

Monday and Wednesday exhibited similar doldrums. On the earlier day, the Government received a nasty knock, the ever ubiquitous Mr. Graham being compelled to withdraw his resolution limiting the extra allowances to pre-war pensioners. The attendance was meagre, but everyone who was there appeared to attack the proposals with incredible fury: and, finding himself without a friend, the Secretary of the Treasury gracefully withdrew, at the price of a wasted afternoon. The evening showed a similar waste, the House rising soon after dinner because there was no business left to perform. And Wednesday was occupied with irrelevant matter. The Government drifts on. There is no obstruction. There is no programme. The Budget seems likely to remain as its solitary successful achievement, and that only because there *must* be a Budget every year. Mr. Wheatley retains his aspect of cheery optimism, which alone is an asset. But he is ploughing through deep waters in negotiations with

rural and urban authorities, the Treasury, under the formidable economic grip of Mr. Snowden, the builders and the builders' Unions, all oppressed by the increasing rise in the cost of erecting houses. If he gets his much-advertised "Housing Bill" at all, it will only be because it will be cut to the bone and represent just a skeleton, throwing upon himself and his successors the work of implementing the promises so lavishly scattered. His personal popularity and his indefatigable labour may help him where, without such qualifications, only disaster seems likely. The great Committees upstairs are empty (a thing unprecedented at this stage of the session); or only occupied by private members' or lesser Government Bills. There are rumours of a Government intention to "cut the knot," rise early in August, and confront the House of Commons in the Autumn with a serious programme. If that be so, the first six months of Labour Government will have been one of the most fruitless Parliamentary periods within living memory.

M.P.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Sir,—The correspondence on this subject, originating as it did with Mr. Lloyd George's article in your issue of April 12th, seems to me to have failed singularly in its prime object, *i.e.*, to locate the causes of the appalling and sustained unemployment with a view to the application of the necessary correctives.

It has been pointed out that there is an excessive disparity between wholesale and retail prices, the former recently given at 50 per cent. over pre-war, and the latter at 76 per cent., and this must, of course, be reflected in higher wages with correspondingly higher-priced products for home consumption and export alike.

Now the very existence of this country commercially depends upon our capacity to manufacture cheaply. To achieve this, two fundamentals are necessary—a cheap and efficient transport system and healthy competition amongst those engaged in every trade and industry.

How do things stand in these matters to-day?

The great bulk of traffic must perforce by its very nature and magnitude—ores, coal, steel, raw material, and manufactured articles alike—be carried over the railways, actually the cheapest and best method of land haulage, the carriage rates upon which are crushingly and indefensibly excessive, standing as they do, when added flat rates and additional cartage and other charges are taken into account, on the average well over 60 per cent. beyond pre-war figures, and this in spite of the vast savings which amalgamation and regrouping have effected. Many of these items—as, for instance, towage and shipment dues—average well over 100 per cent. in excess of those of 1913, to the obvious detriment of our import and export trade.

The plain fact, of course, is that the railways were decontrolled before trade had recovered from the transition from war to peace, and the increased rates sanctioned simply paralyzed trade recovery.

The spirit of the Railway Act of 1921 is that the companies are to charge such rates as will yield to them their pre-war net revenue, and it is the clear duty of Parliament to examine minutely their accounts and insist that this and no more is obtained.

I am satisfied that a committee of experienced actuaries and other qualified experts would find that, allowing for a conservative increase in traffic which would ensue from reduced rates and fares (for the latter are on all fours with the former and have a direct bearing upon costs of manufacture and of living), present charges ought not to be more than 25 per cent. over pre-war.

The effect of such a reduction would be immediately felt in substantially decreased costs all round with a corresponding fillip to trade.

Whenever traders have demanded a reduction in rates, and recently when the Mining Federation appealed to the Rates Tribunal for the abolition of the flat rate reduction on coal, an entirely new impost since 1914, the companies claimed that it was largely owing to excessive wages that they were unable to make any reduction. In this connection I would remind you that although wages are considerably higher than in many other occupations compared to pre-war figures, these latter were upon the point of being greatly increased at the outbreak of hostilities, and thus they are apparently though not really excessive.

Of the 1,300 millions sterling invested in the railways, between 300 and 400 millions represent the cost of the land on which they are built, and therefore this large item does not demand any additional tribute from users in the form of increased charges.

Postal rates form an excellent comparison with railway charges, all in favour of the former where the wages element is greater, and yet we know that a profit could be earned if letters were delivered at the pre-war figure. Further, the known additions to cash reserves, apart from the £60,000,000 paid by the Government for alleged excessive wear and tear during the period of control, still unexpended, and the increased dividends paid, both point to the same inference.

How far the railway facilities for coal export are behind sound modern practice may be gauged from the fact that steamers of 8,000 tons D.W. cargo and bunkers are regularly loaded within one day in the United States, whilst an average at our coal ports is at least ten times as long, and the companies are making no serious attempt to remedy this.

Let the country put its railway transport charges down to their proper economic level, and at once there will pass from the roads an immense volume of traffic which ought never to have gone there.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu is, I submit, strangely out of touch with realities on this subject when in your issue of the 10th inst. he asserted "Traffic breeds traffic," and that "modern road vehicles have evolved for themselves a new and very important department of transport." "Nor has this development injured railways." The fact is that the great bulk of traffic now being transported over the roads is a direct loss to the railways, to which avenue it would return were rates reduced to their proper level.

Sir William Acworth points out in the same issue that road motor haulage under economical conditions costs 6d. or 8d. per ton mile, whereas the average comparative railway rate is 3d. per ton mile, and it follows therefore that the road transport is catering for the best traffic, *i.e.*, that of the highest classification.

The road problem will very largely vanish when the iron road monopoly, which ought to serve the national interest, does so either as at present constituted or under national ownership.

Now as to the second condition—healthy competition amongst home manufacturers and distributors. A profound change has taken place in this connection during the last two decades, but more particularly from 1914 to date, for the trade ring and kindred associations have acquired a stranglehold upon almost every trade and business.

Take the case of bread. The Master Millers' Association fix an arbitrary price for flour, modified to some little extent by foreign competition, but it is notorious that they charge the same flat price for flour whether delivery is within fifty yards or fifty miles of their mills. I recommend the balance sheet of one of these firms published in the "Times" last week to the attention of those who believe that flour is being supplied at an economic price.

But the case of the Master Bakers' Association is much worse, and this tight trade ring works in close association with the Millers' Association, and the latter, at the behest of the powerful bakers' ring, in a well-known case refused to supply flour to a large firm of bakers who cut the price of the loaf by twopence.

Lord Bledisloe, a former Minister of Agriculture, said recently, what is indeed common knowledge, that bakers throughout the country are charging in concert 2d. per quartern loaf more than yields to a baker with normal modern plant a profit of 20 per cent. upon his cost. In other words, our people are paying equivalent to a tax of 12s. per quarter on wheat, home-grown and imported alike, to the bakers, even ignoring the millers' excessive toll in price.

This is typical of the milk, meat, fruit, boot-repairing, horse-shoeing, and indeed practically all retail trades.

The case of house building is instructive. The master builder, the builder's merchant, are each members of a trade

ring. Bricks, tiles, cement, lead, iron pipes, light castings, glass, electric lamps, and in fact almost everything required in house construction, are supplied at grossly excessive prices, and output ruthlessly reduced to maintain these whenever necessary. In fine, the operation of the trade ring is equivalent to a system of internal protection even more blighting than a high tariff wall.

The Coalition Government of 1918-22, of which Mr. Lloyd George was at the head, with the reports and recommendations of the Committee on Trusts in its hands early in 1919, ought to have amended the law regarding restraint of trade and put into force the wise and far-reaching policy which that body suggested, and it is safe to assert that our trade would to-day be in a far healthier condition.

No time should be lost in carrying out both these reforms, for their cumulative effect in coping with unemployment would be immediate and salutary.—Yours, &c.,

T. G. ADAMS.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

THE FRENCH IN THE RUHR.

SIR,—In your leader last week on the French and German elections attention was drawn to the risks that, in their satisfaction at the Leftward swing of the pendulum in France, Leftward elements here and elsewhere might be misled into underrating the power of mischief of the permanent illiberal factors in the situation, viz., of the French military and bureaucracy in the Rhineland and the Ruhr. That these elements are not in the least relaxing their stranglehold on the Ruhr the following facts will show.

At no fewer than twelve towns and townships in the Ruhr the French have lately put forward new and *increasing* demands for military accommodation of all sorts. So far from anticipating withdrawal, they appear to be doing their utmost to dig themselves in for an indefinitely prolonged stay. The details of the demands actually forwarded to the German municipal authorities of the various places affected will perhaps most clearly convey the spirit which animates the Occupation, and the confidence of the French authorities that their sojourn in the Ruhr is in no appreciable danger of coming to a speedy end. The French demand at:—

LENNEP school buildings or, alternatively, new barracks capable of housing 250 men for an indefinite period. (Hitherto this place had been only lightly held.)

RATINGEN the State Teachers' Training College and another school, to which must be added extensive and costly alterations. (The intention is apparently to secure accommodation for a permanent garrison.)

WULFRATH new infantry barracks.

MUNSTER and ARNSBERG alterations and constructions similar to the foregoing.

BOCHUM new barracks for a regiment of artillery.

DORTMUND new barracks for five artillery sections.

RECKLINGHAUSEN new quarters, at an estimated cost of 2.4 million gold marks, for a cavalry regiment, in addition to alterations of existing public buildings costing 1.4 million gold marks. Further, a drill ground and existing barracks, and 170 furnished flats with an average of four rooms each for officers, "Micum" officials, N.C.O.s, and others.

ESSEN new stabling for 1,200 horses; 670 flats (apart from 310 previously requisitioned); in addition, the municipal authorities have been advised that new barracks will shortly be required.

WITTEN accommodation for an infantry regiment of 1,500 men, involving the requisitioning of 190 flats and six schools, including the classical and modern High Schools; further, the erection of an officers' club, an N.C.O.s' club, a school for French children, and premises for a canteen.

METTMANN accommodation for a permanent garrison of 1,000 men and regimental staff. To this end there have already been requisitioned the Teachers' Training College, the modern High School, two elementary schools, one large factory, and eighty-two fully furnished flats of one to seven rooms each; while the immediate construction is demanded of stabling for 130 horses, coach-houses for twenty-eight large and twenty-four small carts, a hospital, a club for officers, another for N.C.O.s, and two shops for a canteen. *All this to be supplied by a town of only* 10,000 *inhabitants.*

DUSSELDORF extensive new barracks for a regiment of artillery at an estimated minimum cost of 8-10 *million gold marks*; these to be completed within three months; refusal on the part of the town to be punished by the imposition of "sanctions" (announced in the form of wholesale requisitioning of public buildings in the "Times" of the 20th inst.); in addition a sports stadium and a school for N.C.O.s are planned. Municipal officials opposing acquiescence in these orders by May 9th at latest to be subject to court martial.

Demands on this scale cannot possibly be met out of existing accommodation, the housing shortage in Germany being even more acute than here. Refusal to build new accommodation brings in its train eviction of inhabitants until sufficient room is released for the French demand to be met. Acquiescence in building, whether the cost be shouldered by the municipalities, the Federal State, or the Reich, means the imposition of a burden under which the present precarious financial structure will break. The problem is an acute one, not only for the victimized towns, but also for all the Governments interested in a speedy liquidation of the insane extravagance of the Ruhr: not least, perhaps, for any French Government of the Left that may come into being animated with a sincere will to find a solution of the issue on the basis of the Dawes Report. Such a Government is likely to find its efforts blocked at every turn by the vested interests which have been allowed during the last year and a half to take root in the Ruhr. Elements of the Left both here and elsewhere will do well to take stock of forces pitted against them, and so to lay their plans that interested obstruction in the Ruhr shall not render nugatory their efforts for a lasting settlement.—Yours, &c.,

C. E. ELLINGTON WRIGHT.

MR. WALPOLE ON SCOTT.

SIR,—I should like to be allowed to express my gratitude to Mr. Hugh Walpole for his discourse on the "greatness and the littleness" not of human life, though that text has been made the theme of two or three of the greatest sermons ever preached, but of Sir Walter Scott.

I was, however, a little taken aback to discover that this preacher was evidently not a little afraid lest Scott's reputation, now that it has been discovered that he was "little" as well as "great," should be in any real danger.

I am, as my signature admits, many years older than Mr. Walpole, but despite my years, I still freely mix with boys of between twenty-five and fifty, and it is news to me to hear that there has been any actual occultation of Sir Walter's fame.

Scott is no longer read with the avidity he once was; nor do his writings excite the same conversational activity as do the novels of Bennett, Conrad, Galsworthy, Hardy, Lawrence, Moore, Walpole, and Wells (names chosen at random but carefully arranged alphabetically). These and others engage the attention of the stalls, and occasionally arouse the enthusiasm of the pit. And it is only right that they should do so, for they speak the language of the day, and repeat, or contradict, the humours of the passing time.

Sir Walter cannot do this—his hundred volumes, in more than a hundred ways, belong to a buried past. His history, his heroes, his morals, his plots, his rhymes, his easy flowing diction; nay, if you insist upon it, a baker's dozen of his novels, all show signs of extreme exhaustion.

Sir Walter did not write his novels in three or four volumes for the schoolroom; and the shocking bad taste of schoolmasters in selecting their horrible holiday tasks has done Scott grievous injury.

But look forward half a century to 1974, and consider the vast crowds of new novelists, with their new methods, their new morals, their new styles! With whose markets will these unborn novelists interfere? Whom will they supersede? Will it be Scott, at his best, with Lockhart's Life behind him? I at least feel sure it will not. Scott's style when at its best (and here I should like, if only I knew the "experienced" gentleman quoted by Mr. Walpole as being of the opinion that it is no longer possible for any intelligent person to take any interest in Sir Walter, to call his attention to an article by Mr. Verrall—of whom he may have heard—in the "Quarterly Review," some time ago, on Scott's style)—Scott's gallery of created characters, Scott's narrative, when his memories and his imagination go hand-in-hand, and at full speed, all these, with Scott's own life and character behind him, will defy time for another century and a half.

Scott's novels will never *compete* with the best novels of the day, either now or a century hence, but they will always be *behind* them, and not infrequently may pass them on the course, even in their own day.

That this is Mr. Walpole's opinion his spirited discourse proves most satisfactorily; but why need there be any room for "doubt, hesitation, or pain"? I feel none; but then I am—Yours, &c.,

A SEPTUAGENARIAN.

ARCHITECTURE AT WEMBLEY

By ROGER FRY.

PRINCE ALBERT'S great original genius discovered—at least Queen Victoria said so—the idea of the great Exhibition of 1851. The idea was fertile. It has borne fruit, and, in general, each fruit has been more magnificent, more imposing, more intoxicating than the last. At Wembley it becomes colossal. An area equal to that of central London has been enclosed, and most of the buildings within it are of abnormal size. Numbers give one no idea, but, if the guide-book is to be believed, the Palace of Industry alone covers an area five times that of Trafalgar Square. In general, one may say that everything is five times as large as the most exorbitant could demand. We have had so many great Exhibitions in various parts of the world since that first daring venture of the Victorians that one might suppose that a style appropriate to Exhibition Architecture would have been evolved. One would suppose that the first principle to lay down would be that, since the Exhibition is really a glorified Fair, the architecture should be as cheap, as quickly made, and as easily removable as possible. On the other hand, since the structure is temporary and flimsy, the designer may allow himself a much freer invention, a much more capricious fancy than would be tolerable or even possible in permanent work. Exhibition architecture, in fact, occupies a position midway between the architectural setting of a theatrical *décor* and the buildings of actual life.

In the Paris Exhibition of 1900 this principle was fully accepted, and the most fantastic extravaganzas in fibrous plaster reared their convolved façades along both sides of the Seine. It was mostly in villainous bad taste, but it had a certain absurd and reckless gaiety, a quality of unblushing make-believe and improvisation which at least expressed the idea of its function.

At Wembley the architecture divides itself into two classes. On the one hand we have the various buildings erected by the different countries of the Empire, the vast Australian and Canadian palaces, the huge Indian courtyard, down to the more modest endeavours of Fiji, Bermuda, and Sarawak. All these follow more or less the Exhibition idea of constructing temporary and slight buildings adequate for the purpose and no more. On the other hand we have the official Exhibition buildings, the entrance gates, the covered colonnades, the Palaces of Industry and Engineering, the Stadium, and the Government building. These have all been built either in reinforced concrete or in concrete blocks. It is, I suppose, the largest experiment in this kind of construction that has been carried out in England. As it is pretty certain that this is destined to be the chief method of constructing large buildings in the future the experiment is not without interest, even though we may doubt whether Exhibition buildings run up in haste for a temporary purpose are quite the proper place to try it in.

For ferro-concrete building has peculiar qualities. In this method of construction a wooden framework is erected into which the concrete is poured and rammed down between the steel reinforcing bars. The building is in fact cast like a plaster cast. When once everything is prepared the actual construction proceeds very rapidly, and, paradoxically enough, what is run up so quickly is almost impossible to destroy.

It is here that its appropriateness to such a purpose as Wembley seems a little dubious. One feels that buildings which are more eternal than the Pyramids, even if they can be run up in two years, ought not to be. Work that is destined for all time should not be hurriedly improvised. At Wembley matters are all the worse from the fact that these vast constructions were entrusted to a single firm of architects and engineers, and, to be perfectly frank, they have not risen to the occasion.

Some excuse must be made for them. The purpose of Exhibition buildings and the medium employed were at cross-purposes. The essence of the one is its temporary character, the licence it allows for scenic effects and capricious invention; the essence of the other is its extreme permanence and durability, together with the extraordinary freedom which it allows, since most of the laws of stone and brick construction can be flouted in a material of such great resistance and weight-supporting power.

This latter quality, no doubt, might have been used to theatrical purposes. Imagine for a moment what a stage designer like Bernini would have done with such a material and such resources.

Evidently, however, the fear of eternity was the main consideration with the designers, and that, combined with the extreme haste with which the whole affair was pushed through, has resulted in something so infinitely tame, dull, correct, and timid, so entirely devoid of any co-ordinating idea, that if ever a taste for architecture should arise in this country the nation will be asked to foot another large bill for dynamite to blow it all up.

It is characteristic of many English artists to be much more concerned with the surface finish of their work than with the framework of the design. There is a great dislike of leaving on the surface the roughnesses inevitable to its formation. This is typical of the work at Wembley. The architect had no time to conceive any large co-ordinating scheme, to find how the buildings should be related to the whole space, or how any one division of a building should be related to its general aspect, but he found time to invent numerous ingenious devices for giving a pleasing and varied surface to the concrete. The usual process in ferro-concrete is to construct the mould of plain boards the joints of which leave a trace on the concrete. Instead of this, the architect has devised all kinds of tongued and reeded boarding so as to get a play of different kinds of surface with corresponding changes in the tone effect of different parts. This would be, no doubt, an excellent device in the hands of an artist who had an idea of proportion and a feeling for the general plastic relief of his design. As it is, all these refinements merely accentuate the triviality, the niggling pedantry, and want of invention which, as it seems to me, every one of these buildings displays. They are large enough in all conscience, but nowhere is there any sense of scale. Finish, refinement, good taste in the negative sense of a timid restraint from any clear expression whatever, mark every part of the design of these buildings. Not once does a generous or even an amusing idea break the dull monotony.

In front of the Government building six lions have been skilfully cast in concrete. The guide-book tells us that beside these Landseer's lions in Trafalgar Square are mere kittens. It is true that they are big; what is more immediately evident is that they are much too big for the building they adorn. They are, incidentally, far less interesting as sculpture than even Sir Edwin's indifferent performance.

It is a relief to turn from these all too eternal monuments of witless industry to the flimsier structures which

the overseas countries supply. There is a Maori house or temple built of reed thatching in a carved wooden framework which could doubtless be taken to pieces in a day, but which one would quite like to keep.

Burma has erected a pavilion with incredible intricacies of carved and fretted woodwork, with columns made of bits of mirror and coloured glass, which is quite gay and unpretentious, and the bridge by which one approaches it over a little canal shows what amusing shapes ferro-concrete will allow. But perhaps the nearest approach to any genuine architectural emotion is to be got from the replica of a West African walled town. Here at last are signs of an intelligent sensitiveness to architectural forms. Here the relief of one surface, the recession of another, has intention and a plastic meaning. There is a doorway in one of the buildings which is really beautiful, or would be but for a silly European relief which is stuck in to ornament it. I suppose the originals of these buildings were made of mud. The replica is of some plaster material, but the forms would be admirably suited to ferro-concrete construction. In actual size this town is a pigmy beside the towering walls of the Stadium, under which it hides. But turn away from the Stadium and you get a sense of mass, of dignity of scale which marks the triumph of intelligent barbarism over the last word in civilized ineptitude.

I ought perhaps in justice to add that an American gentleman who claims to have constructed more ferro-concrete buildings than any other man has stated in a published interview that he regards the Stadium as the finest work yet executed in this material. This is handsome of him, but makes one glad to think that his own masterpieces are safely and immovably stored on the other side of the Atlantic.

A SUMMER'S CRICKET.

By ALEC WAUGH.

WE have all of us our own formula for the division of our time; an arbitrary formula for the most part. Day does not necessarily begin with the rising of the sun; for a large section of the world indeed it does not start till the hour of the second cocktail. Nor does it end with twilight. In the same way with the seasons of the year. For those of us whose lives are divided between an allegiance for cricket and Rugby football, winter and summer are terms that bear no relation to the heat of the sun or the blueness of the sky. They are merely the periods of the year which we devote to the one or the other game. October may be a time of quivering golden heat; and May a month of wind and rain and cold. But whether the sky is blue or grey, it is summer as long, and only as long, as you can see against green grass, through the window of the train that is sweeping you through the shires, the gleam of yellow wickets; as you can read in the late news-column of your evening paper, Middlesex 205 for 3. Hendren out, 87. Summer begins with the cricket season on the first Saturday of May, and ends with it half-way through September.

Four and a half months of it. And for the seven and a half long months of winter the wiser cricketers will have been performing at their offices prodigies of industry so that there may be for them in June the minimum of work, so that they may not have to spend at their desk one more than is strictly necessary of the rich hours which are luring them into the sunlight. Most of us can work in winter when the rain is dashing against our study window. But it is a different matter when the sunlight streams on to the wall behind us, and we know that all over London stumps are being pitched and white-coated umpires are strolling in their leisurely, majestic fashion down pavilion steps. There are too many temptations, too many threads to pull us from the desk at which the state of our pass-book assures us we should spend the entire day.

And indeed there is little, if anything, better than the club cricket which, in its various forms, comprises, I suppose, something like nine-tenths of the grand sum of cricket. One is inclined perhaps at times, as one staggers homewards, after a long day's fielding, beneath the weight of a bag that seems to be dragging one's arm out of its socket, to envy the schoolboy, whose bats are stacked in the pavilion, who has only at the end of afternoon school to jump upon a bicycle to find himself, within ten minutes, ready to start his game. And it is a grim business sometimes, that lugging of a heavy bag down dusty highroads and along the crowded passages of the Tube. A day's cricket means usually at the least a couple of hours' travelling. But, for all that, club cricket is the more enjoyable. There are no anxieties. For the average man a day's cricket is a day's holiday. And he intends to make it one. He intends to enjoy himself even if he makes no runs, takes no wickets and, in addition, drops a sitter. The schoolboy could hardly feel very happy at the end of such a day. Too much is at stake. There are only eleven places in a side. There is only one cup between seven houses. In club cricket victory and defeat are very secondary considerations. Each club probably has its own particular rival, its own star match of the season, of which the captain says: "Well, children, if you win this match you can lose the other forty." But usually "win" or "lose" does not greatly matter. One would rather win, of course. But one is keener on having it a close affair. And few schoolboys would prefer to lose a house match by one run to winning it by three hundred.

There is also this supreme advantage. The club cricketer knows in advance more or less what to expect. He has out-grown the high-hearted optimism with which he used to watch Warner's centuries from the back of the mound stand at Lord's, feeling that only some dozen years lay between himself and the arena. He knows now that such high exploits are not for him. He no longer anxiously compares his form of one season with another; no longer spends harassed hours wondering if he is "going off." The club cricketer has realized his limitations. Very few of us get any coaching when the 'teens are done with. And our play when we have grown once acclimatized to the atmosphere of club cricket neither improves nor deteriorates very much. One season's figures work out more or less on a level with those of its predecessor. In a wet season one's bowling average is slightly better; one's batting average a little worse. And in a dry season *vice versâ*. But we walk no longer in expectation of some sudden transportation to first-class form. And we are happier so. We are armoured against the undue elation that is apt to follow one of the runs of luck that come now and again to all of us. We do not, when we start off with a couple of forties and a sixty, begin to wonder when we are going to get that telegram from Mann asking us to play for Middlesex. We merely thank heaven for our good fortune, and pray that the compensating avalanche of ducks will not be too overwhelming. Nor, equally, when May comes and goes leaving us with a single-figure batting average, do we start wondering at what point exactly we shall cease to receive further invitations. We know, and we rely on our captain to know, that this sort of thing cannot go on for ever. We accept as it comes our good or our ill fortune, and we let neither worry us unduly. Whether we start well, or badly, there are bound to come sometimes those intoxicating afternoons when the ball seems as big to us as a football, when every over seems to provide us with two half-volleys, when none of our mishits go to hand. That day, once at least in a season, is bound to come. And, in the meantime, there lies the summer spread in front of us with its sure promise of good things. It is like the sitting down, in the best of restaurants, to a dinner arranged specially in advance, and by the best of chefs. Anxiety has no place there.

THE PRESENTATION.

THE boys at a school decided to give a present to a master who was leaving. Apart from one or two of his favourites, they all disliked him, for he was a tyrant and a blackguard. But now, partly because they felt that half-a-crown was not much to give to someone who had been used to exact much greater tolls of leisure, health, and comfort (for he constantly detained them on holidays, gave them double evening tasks, or made them stand for hours in a draughty passage outside his class-room door, not to speak of canings and slappings), and partly from a fear of displeasing him, which was now quite needless, all of them subscribed to this leaving present. All but one. This one was not less frightened of the master than were the others. He had suffered more than any, having a spirit of independence which prevented him from humouring the whims by which the master had asserted his arbitrary authority.

To these whims the other boys, to whom so much that happened at school seemed senseless and capricious, had in a certain measure grown accustomed. Thus they consented to number the pages of their exercise-books alternately in Roman and Arabic figures, to write their Christian names in book-type and their surnames in capitals, to pass in front of the master's desk before they took their seats, to write English on alternate lines, but French on every line; and these things seemed to them no more arbitrary than the genitive of *domina*, and no more useless. But to one boy these senseless regulations, which the rest curried favour by obeying, seemed humiliating and despicable, and through constantly disobeying them, he became the especial target of the master's sarcasm and violence.

When he refused to subscribe to the present he did so out of contempt for the servility of the boys, who were powerless to harm him, and not as an insult to the master, of whom he was still partly afraid, because he could not believe that anyone who had done him so much harm could suddenly be removed out of his life for ever. He had no experience of subscriptions. He saw that there was a list, and he supposed that other boys would know that he had refused. But he did not imagine the master would know.

He had been told that the head-boy would give the present, and (it was to be a clock) had imagined him taking it to the master's room on the last day of term.

When that day came all the boys were summoned to the largest class-room. The headmaster sat on the dais with the leaving master at his side. He made a speech in which he constantly mentioned the retiring master by name. But what he said seemed to have no connection at all with that master or with the school as they knew it. He spoke of the master's patience, kindness, untiring devotion. And as they listened it seemed to the boys that what the headmaster was saying could not be merely untrue. Somewhere all this kindness and patience had certainly existed, and, if it had not existed for them, that was their fault. It moved them deeply to think that so kind a man was leaving them. Next the retiring master rose. He said that he had always done his best for them, that all his strictness was meant for their good.

Then the head-boy stepped forward with the clock and laid it on the desk, making as he did so a short speech which he had learnt by heart. He spoke so low that no one heard what he said. The master took his hand and shook it warmly. The head-boy said something to him, which must have been to remind him that the present was from all the boys. For the master nodded and began to pass along the benches, shaking each boy by the hand, and saying, "I thank you."

The boy who had not subscribed was trembling. His heart beat quicker and quicker as the master passed from row to row. He could not be thanked for what he had not done. He began to frame the words. His heart beat so loud he did not know if they were audible. "I did not subscribe." "But you will give me your hand." He felt it taken, and as the master grasped it, the boy began to weep. To weep with pride that his hand had been grasped by the noble and patient man whom the headmaster had described in his speech.

For the real master, the one who had bullied and raved and played the tyrant for so many years, had ceased to exist; a little grave-side eloquence had eclipsed a hundred thrashings, ear-pullings, calumnies, and impositions.

ARTHUR WALEY.

FROM ALPHA TO OMEGA

"MAN and the Masses" (more familiar to English readers as "Masses and Man"), which was produced last Sunday by the Stage Society, is the best-known work of the leader of European "Expressionism," Ernst Toller, and has been the greatest theatrical success of revolutionary Germany. The Stage Society laboured under considerable disadvantages. First the copyright laws prevented their using the excellent translation of Miss Vera Mendel, and they had to be content with a very inferior prose version. Secondly, the stage was much too small, which prevented their obtaining the cinematograph atmosphere which was so effective in Berlin. Expressionism aims at a symbolical presentment of a world situation rather than the personal reaction of individuals to external events, and is a violent revulsion against Naturalism in the theatre. Its weakness lies in its setting out to do something for which the theatre is unsuited and which can be done better on the films. Further, a series of loosely co-ordinated tableaux acted as unrealistically as possible is apt to degenerate into a series of Chauve-Souris stunts. Neither the acting nor the production reached a high level on this Sunday, while the pedestrian translation rendered it impossible for the audience to judge the literary quality of the original. The balance of the play was incidentally destroyed in order to make "The Woman" sympathetic to the stalls. Toller is attempting something original in endeavouring to represent not individuals, but the world in chaos; still, it is difficult to believe that he has yet found a satisfactory art-form for the conveying of his message. The best theatrical achievements of modern Germany have been seen on the films. "Man and the Masses" bears considerable æsthetic resemblance to "Dr. Caligari," and all the way through I felt the author was working in the wrong medium. To abolish personal psychology and personal emotions from the stage is also to abolish the functions of the theatre.

"White Cargo" is a stirring melodrama dealing with the decay of the "white man" in the damp heat of Tropical Africa. A tiny colony of whites engaged in the rubber trade is pictured to us in various stages of moral collapse. The final degradation is symbolized by the forming of unions with native women, a question which becomes an obsession with the whites. They think about nothing else, desire nothing else, and fear nothing else. It is assumed by the author, though he never gives his reasons, that such unions are so appalling that the question need not be discussed rationally at all. The audience seemed to agree with him, with a result that a combination of fine acting and racial prejudice lashed their nerves to a pitch of frenzy. But as the whites apparently intended to live in this appalling place for years together without ever going home on leave, and as there were no white women within hundreds of miles, it is difficult to see what alternative could be reasonably expected—for the only real alternative was that the whites should leave Africa to the blacks. There are some good theatrical moments in the play, and the picture of frayed nerves in Weston (who was superbly acted by Mr. Franklin Dyall) was a good piece of work. But the success of the play

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